DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 349 CS 217 460

AUTHOR Cubine, Gary R.
TITLE The Educational Value of Expressive Writing.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Essays; Free Writing; Higher Education; *Journal Writing; Learning Strategies; Secondary Education; *Teacher Role; *Writing Exercises; Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; Writing Skills; Writing Strategies
IDENTIFIERS *Expressive Writing; Personal Writing

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses expressive writing, which can be defined as writing in a conversational and personal way. The paper explains that, in this expressive mode, writers are allowed the freedom to mull over ideas and to highlight certain ideas, even as they write, making it a vehicle for learning. The paper presents discussion on the time (i.e., the age of the student) to teach expressive writing, which is suggested as concurrent with other writing instruction, and on the correlation of expressive writing activities with various stages of the writing process. The paper provides a chart of (1) the stages of the writer's creative process; (2) the natural activity during the process; (3) the expressive writing activity to be used as a stimulus; and (4) the teacher's role in the activity. The paper outlines a 4-part journal writing activity which includes: assignment, selection, revision, and scrutiny and explains that freewriting, cubing, and clustering can also be used as additional stimuli during this process. (Contains 10 references.) (CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 308 999

THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING

Gary R. Cobine

1996

CS 213460

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Michel de Montaigne, the sixteenth-century French Renaissance writer, coined the term "essay" for the way in which he would write about a topic in a personal and spontaneous way in order to test his knowledge. In every "essay," he wanted to discover his personal presumptions about the topic and then to speculate about *possible* universal truths about the topic. He would question a custom such as wearing clothes or a more such as telling the truth, matters that his contemporaries considered unquestionable. His motto, inscribed on the medallion worn around his neck, was Que sais-je?: "What do I know?"

EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING

The personal-essay form originated by Montaigne is an exemplar of what James Britton calls "expressive writing." According to Britton, writers go into an expressive mode whenever they write in a highly conversational and personal way (N. Collins 1). In this expressive mode, they tend to write in forms such as letters, journals, personal essays, and autobiographies, forms that allow them freedom to mull over ideas and to highlight certain ideas, even as they write. For teachers, the theory of "expressive writing" is especially fascinating, for the expressive mode is potentially a vehicle for learning, in general, and for learning to write, in particular.

Insofar as students gain clarity by writing statements of belief and meaning (N. Collins 5), the expressive mode is a vehicle for learning. By expressing in writing their reaction to a bewildering experience, a current dilemma, or a troublesome conflict, for example, they are better able to broaden their view on this personal predicament. Even if they experience the predicament vicariously, through literary characters or historical figures in a school study, for example, they are better able to sort through the array of confusing incidentals and take a personal stand towards the predicament. In other words, rather than become overwhelmed by personal or transpersonal predicaments, they become oriented. They learn the possible significance of the predicament.

Insofar as students develop their linguistic ability by writing expressively (N. Collins 3), the expressive mode is a vehicle for learning to write. By writing regularly in a personal, conversational way, they overlook

grammatical bugs temporarily and look over the rhetorical horizon. To put it another way, in learning to clarify beliefs and interpret meanings, they come to consider their audience and purpose. And in using language purposefully, they come to use language respectfully. Thus, in writing, they come to see a need for correct usage. As experience in writing comes, then, so does a confluence of rhetorical, grammatical, and mechanical concerns for student-writers.

THE TIME TO TEACH EXPRESSIVE WRITING

Controversy has arisen about the age at which the expressive mode originates and, therefore, about the age at which it should be taught in school. According to Britton, the expressive mode precedes the persuasive and informative modes in a writer's linguistic development (N. Collins 3). The implication is that expressive writing be taught first, in elementary school. According to another theory, however, the persuasive mode, growing out of the "regulative language" that children learn from their environment, precedes the expressive mode in children's linguistic development (Newkirk 348). Here, the implication is that expository writing, not expressive writing, be taught first, so that students' natural ability does not atrophy until high school, when they seem to struggle with expository writing (Newkirk 348).

Neither theory seems entirely accurate. Authors of great literature, for example, who are obviously consummating, not beginning, their linguistic development, write through a powerful expressive mode. At the same time, authors of dynamic journalistic and scholarly reports, who are also consummating their linguistic development, write through powerful critical, persuasive, and informative modes. The apparent contradiction between theories is resolved if the various modes of writing are seen to be equally available to all writers at all ages rather than hierarchically arranged in tiers by age and talent. In other words, journalists and scholars use the expressive mode as much as literary artists, even though they de-emphasize expressiveness in their product. In this view, the expressive mode is seen to be related not so much to a linguistic stage in a writer's development as to a recurring stage in a writer's process of writing.

THE EXPRESSIVE MODE IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The expressive mode fits not only into the expression stage of a writer's process, but also into almost every other stage. As a writer confronts a topic, collects and recollects material, puts material into incipient forms, recognizes patterns of ideas and details, and reworks the material in various ways, the writer's expository modes are complemented and invigorated by the expressive mode, like a linguistic ebb and flow of creative power. By structuring expressive-writing activities and correlating them with particular stages of the writing process, a teacher can draw this natural linguistic activity out of a student-writer.

Recursive Stages in the Writer's Creative Process (Walshe 24)	Natural Activity during the Stage of the Process	Expressive-Writing Activity as a Stimulus	Teacher's Role in the Activity
Problem	recognizing and confronting a potential topic	*journal writing	To help students to discover personally significant topics and material
Investigation	collecting and recollecting material about a topic	*journal writing *brainstorming	To help students to identify material germane to their topic
Expression	putting material into incipient forms	*journal writing *focused-freewriting *cubing	To help the students to mold material in various ways and to consider possible messages, ideas, orders, forms, etc.

Insight	recognizing patterns of ideas and details	*journal writing *clustering	To help the students to gather and organize ideas about their topic
Announcement	sharing material	*journal writing	
Reaction	heeding suggestions	*journal writing	
Refinement	rethinking and reworking	*journal writing	

Journal writing can be used as a stimulus for various stages of the creative process; it can be used especially well for the problem stage, when students explore through private, exploratory, unedited writing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Connors 25). In these journals, sometimes called "think books," they contemplate, make connections, and ask questions (Boone 33). As they do so, the teacher helps them to satisfy three purposes: to explore potential topics, to write expressively about these topics, and to recognize potential material about these topics (Connors 26). First, by keeping an on-going record of their thoughts, students gather the seeds for topics of special interest. Second, by writing expressively, they nourish the seeds -- their language becomes more lyrical and metaphorical (Craig 375). Third, by perusing their journals periodically, they harvest: Not only among their thoughts do potential topics emerge, but also in their metaphors hidden knowledge emerges, like a surprising revelation in a dream (Craig 375).

Journal use can be structured into a cohesive series of activities (Connors 26). In an **assignment activity**, to evoke expressive writing among students who may be leery about "self-expression" (Connors 26) and to set boundaries to the wide range of expressive-writing possibilities (C. Collins 51), the teacher makes a specific journal-writing assignment (Connors 26). The teacher suggests an exploratory topic for the day via a "focus question" (Craig 376). Insomuch as possible, the teacher bases suggestions on the backgrounds of the particular group of students (Craig 378). For example,

following Beach's Autobiography-Memoir-Portrait method, the teacher starts the students on an exploration of a personally significant aspect of their own life or of a friend's or relative's life (C. Collins : 51). Or, following Progoff's Journal Workshop method, the teacher starts the students on an imaginary dialogue with a personally significant figure, whether real or fictitious, such as someone whom they consider wise, heroic, admirable, or enviable (Connors 26). Then the students write a journal entry in class, and, if inspired, add to the entry outside of class. At this point, the teacher neither reads nor marks the entries, staying with the purpose of eliciting, not evaluating, expressive writing. Furthermore, the teacher stresses to the students that they, too, withhold judgment in order to write spontaneously and open-mindedly (Craig 376).

In a **selection activity**, in which students enter an investigation stage of the creative process after accumulating numerous journal entries, the teacher calls for a selection of one entry for public uses (Connors 26). The students read their selection aloud while their classmates listen silently. Then, in a **revision activity**, in which students enter expression and insight stages, the teacher calls for a revision of the selection with regard to audience and purpose so that the students begin to shift from an expressive mode towards an expository mode of writing (Connors 26). The students write a characterization of their audience -- age range, principal occupation, political affiliation, religious orientation, social membership, etc. -- and a definition of their purpose -- to persuade, to explain, to evaluate, etc. -- with respect to their audience. Then they revise and rewrite their selection with their audience and purpose in mind.

In a **scrutiny activity**, in which students enter announcement and reaction stages, they distribute copies of their formal drafts to classmates. Now that they have moved from self-expression to self-reflection (C. Collins 51), and have established their purpose for writing (C. Collins 53), the teacher collects and marks the formal paper, especially noting how identifiable the student-writer's audience is, and how consistent and effective his or her purpose is with respect to this audience.

Other activities can be used to reinforce the four-part journal writing activity. Brainstorming, for instance, can be used as an additional stimulus for the investigation stage of the journal writing. Through brainstorming, the students' ideas are brought out and made explicit (Tompkins and Camp 209).

First, they list all the words/phrases that come to mind about their topic, making the list as long as possible. Second, they search for relationships among the items on the list and group these related items. Third, based upon their brainstormed material, they draw up an agenda for research: books, magazines, experts, and other possible sources of information that they can use to elaborate their ideas about the topic.

Freewriting and cubing can be used as additional stimuli for the expression stage of journal writing. Through these activities, students mold their material in various ways and consider possible messages, orders, and forms for their writing. "Focused freewriting" is an especially adaptable activity because the teacher can use it on a case-by-case, moment-to-moment basis, whenever students seem directionless, whether at the beginning, in the middle, or towards the end of their work on an assignment (Tompkins and Camp 214). The students write continuously, pen-to-paper, for five to ten minutes, starting with their topic, but associating freely in all directions. If tempted to backtrack, pause, or stop, they rewrite a personal code-word over and over until a new direction comes to them spontaneously (Tompkins and Camp 212). Similarly, whenever students seem stuck in clichés or in overgeneralizations, the teacher can start a cubing activity in which they consider their topic anew from six perspectives. The teacher guides them during two- to three-minute bursts of writing with six types of prompts (Tompkins and Camp 214): 1. What does your topic look like? sound like? feel like? 2. What is similar to your topic? dissimilar? 3. What does your topic remind you of? 4. What parts does it consist of? 5. What could you use it for? 6. Why is it good? bad?

Clustering can be used as an additional stimulus for the insight stage of journal writing. Through clustering, students gather and organize ideas about their topic (Tompkins and Camp 210). First, they label their topic with a "nucleus word," writing it in the center of a piece of paper and circling it. Second, they draw rays from the "nucleus word," write down an "idea word" at the end of every ray, and circle every "idea word." Third, they draw rays from every "idea word" and write down "detail words" at the end of every ray.

PRINCIPLES BEHIND AN EXPRESSIVE-WRITING ASSIGNMENT

When making an assignment, the teacher who guides students through the recursive stages of the writing process with the use of expressive-writing activities should remember three general principles. First, the teacher should allow students a choice of topic, at least within certain parameters, so that students write about personally significant topics and thereby develop "messages worth sending" (N. Collins 11). A focus question for journal writing, for example, follows this principle insofar as it both allows choice and offers direction. Second, the teacher should require students to articulate their rhetorical purpose at some point during every assignment so that they write purposefully and thereby use language effectively (N. Collins 1). A written description of audience and purpose for a journal selection, for example, pushes students away from mere self-indulgence to real self-expression in writing. Third, the teacher should establish an "expressive relationship" with students so that they come to use the expressive mode naturally to enhance their writing ability (N. Collins 13). For example, a "dialogue journal," in which an informal student-teacher correspondence is carried on, allows the teacher and the student to get acquainted through written communication (Staton 1). In addition, the teacher's non-judgmental response to a student's expressive writing, such as freewriting, allows a similar comradeship to develop. By listening to the student's ideas and intentions, and by suggesting ways in which the student might express these ideas and carry out these intentions, the teacher helps the student to answer Montaigne's guiding question: "What do I know?"

WORKS CITED

Boone, Beth, ed. "Great Teaching Ideas." Virginia English Bulletin. Winter 1983: 32-36.

Cubine, Gary. "Writing Apprehension and the Writing Process." A reaction paper.

Collins, Carmen. "The Power of Expressive Writing in Reading Comprehension." Language Arts. January 1985: 49-54.

Collins, Norma. "Writing as Exploration." ERIC: 1-6.

Connors, Patricia. "Teaching Expressive Writing in Composition Class." Teaching English in the Two-Year College. February 1988: 25-27.

Craig, Sister Therese. Interview with David Dillon. "Self-Discovery through Writing Personal Journals." Language Arts. March 1983: 373-379.

Newkirk, Thomas. "Archimedes' Dream." Language Arts. April 1984: 341-350.

Staton, Jana. "Dialogue Journals." ERIC Digest. 1987: 1-2.

Tompkins, Gail, and Donna Camp. "Rx for Writer's Block." Childhood Education. April 1988: 209-214.

Walshe, R.D. "The Learning Power of Language." English Journal. October 1987: 22-27.